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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 000324

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TAGS: PGOV PREL BK RS

SUBJECT: ENGAGING RUSSIA ON THE FUTURE OF BOSNIA

REF: A. 09 MOSCOW 2728

1B. 09 MOSCOW 2780

1C. 08 MOSCOW 319

1D. 09 MOSCOW 2527

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Susan M. Elliott for reason
s 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

11. (C) While GOR officials share our goal for BiH -- a stable country integrated with Europe -- they are increasingly calling for the Office of High Representative (OHR) to close, assessing that the entities have nearly met all five objectives and two conditions ("5 plus 2") set by the Peace Implementation Council (PIC). The GOR agrees that Bosnia needs constitutional reform in-line with the failed April 2006 reform package, but disagrees that external pressure is necessary and prefers constitutional change take place after OHR closure. Russian experts downplay the GOR's influence on the Republika Srpska (RS), telling us that Russia engages with RS PM Milorad Dodik to maintain a role in the region. Russia is not adamant in its opposition to EU or NATO membership for Bosnia, with FM Lavrov declaring that it is up to Bosnia itself. The GOR does insist, however, that membership in the EU and NATO not erect new barriers (i.e., visa requirements and trade restrictions,) between Russia and BiH. By engaging Russia in dialogue, the U.S. can call them on efforts to front for the RS, while at the same time building agreement on steps forward. End Summary.

"Butmir Package Undermining '5 plus 2'"

12. (C) In a January 29 meeting, Russia's new representative to the PIC Steering Board, Fourth European Deputy Director (Balkans) Pyotr Ivantsov told us that Russia wants "to see Bosnia as a stable and European country," with the PIC agreed "5 plus 2" objectives and conditions the best means to move forward. He assessed that BiH was not far from achieving a consensus on the outstanding defense and state properties issues, but charged that the U.S.-EU "Butmir package" had undermined consensus and diverted attention to finalizing reform. He claimed that the U.S.-EU initiative had antagonized the RS and the Croats, causing them to seek more entity-based rights, while the Bosniaks had taken a stronger negotiating position and were blocking "5 plus 2."

13. (C) While critical of U.S. and EU efforts, Ivantsov said that the GOR supports constitutional reforms in-line with the failed April 2006 package. He argued that constitutional reforms needed to be built on a Bosnian consensus, not done to meet EU or NATO requirements for membership and not done

before OHR had closed and transitioned to the EU Special Representative (EUSR). Ivantsov commented that U.S. and EU energies would have been better spent on concluding "5 plus 2."

February's PIC Steering Board

14. (C) Referring to OHR Inzcko's December 29 letter and "food for thought paper" to PIC Steering Board Members and EUSR Ashton, Ivantsov said that Russia preferred Option 1's transition and closure, but judged that the PIC would likely accept Option 2's status quo. While he did not dismiss Option 3 (strengthening OHR) and 4 (decoupling OHR/EUSR), he made it clear that the GOR was not reconsidering its support of "5 plus 2." In looking toward the PIC Steering Board meeting at the end of February, Ivantsov said that Russia wanted either a decision to close OHR or a timeline that included the six months necessary to transition operations to the EUSR. His Bosnia Desk officer Ivan Gorbunov added, that closure or the promise of imminent closure would change the dynamics of the upcoming Bosnian elections. Gorbunov argued that such a decision would compel Bosnian candidates to lay out a vision of the country's future within the EU, turning the campaign process into a positive articulation of policy, rather than a divisive debate over entity-based authorities.

Bosnian Serbs and Dodik

15. (C) Assessing Russia's real influence on the RS and Dodik
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is difficult, with GOR officials defending Dodik but unwilling to apply pressure on him for any concessions (REF A). On January 29, Gorbunov defended RS PM Dodik as being more constructive than many of Bosnia's leaders on Dayton. He also argued that Dodik was in favor of European integration and pointed to Dodik's statements favoring changes to the BiH constitution, following a European Court of Human Rights decision that certain provisions were discriminatory. While neither Gorbunov nor Ivantsov defended the RS's push for referenda and Dodik's statements on weakening state authority, they maintained the GOR's "principled position" that OHR should do nothing more than what has been agreed to under Dayton. They also pushed back on the necessity for any external pressure on the entities. FM Lavrov has also echoed Dodik's charges that the OHR had used the Bonn Powers outside of his Dayton and PIC Steering Board mandate (REF B).

16. (C) Georgiy Engelhardt of the Russian Academy of Science Slavistics Institute told us separately that contrary to popular views, Russia has little direct influence on the RS, which explained why Russia pressed so little on reforms. He also belittled official Russian statements on "Slavic brotherhood" as a convenient label with little real substance. He argued instead that Russia's "principled position" on Dayton conveniently coincided with the dominant RS interests and provided a way for Russia to remain relevant in the region, if only as a balance to the U.S. Engelhardt assessed that it would be difficult for Russia to withdraw support from the RS and Dodik, as Russia would lose its limited influence.

Working with Russia

17. (C) Comment: As the U.S. seeks to move the process in Bosnia forward, we need to engage Russia in dialogue to both seek their support and to call Russia out on its efforts to front for the RS. While the GOR continues to follow a policy of strict adherence to the Dayton Accords, limited use of Bonn Powers, and an early closure of OHR, there is room for working with them on common goals. Consulting with Russia will also permit us to define our actions, rather than

letting the RS interpret them to the GOR in the worst possible terms -- a lesson revealed by Russia's continuing resentment on our handling of the Butmir package, which they consider as informing them late in the process rather than consulting them (REFS A, B, and C).

¶18. (C) On the Butmir package, the GOR continues to say it is principally opposed to it, but this opposition is based on the sequencing of "5 plus 2" and constitutional reforms, rather than opposition to our ultimate goals. If we can assure Russia that we have similar interests for Bosnia's future and that "5 plus 2" is only part of the answer, we may seek to develop a sequence that moves OHR to closure while at the same time ensuring Bosnia's stability and progress towards EU integration. We must understand that the GOR's support for BiH's EU membership is not absolute, and will fall away if it sees membership requirements on visas and trade erecting new and troublesome barriers between the two countries. Further, Russia will not make public statements in support of Bosnia's membership in NATO, with Lavrov's November 2009 statement in Sarajevo that NATO membership is "up to the people of Bosnia" the best we can expect. (REF D)

¶19. (C) In conversations with former Special Representative Aleksandr Botsan-Kharchenko before his departure to serve as Russia's Ambassador in Sarajevo, he commented repeatedly that Russia wanted a PIC-like body to continue after the closure and transition of OHR. He made it clear to us that the end of the PIC would significantly reduce Russia's influence in the region. While a limited lever, an offer to include Russia in an ongoing consultative role could provide a chip in seeking greater Russian pressure on the RS. Such a role would provide Russia the ability to voice and support RS interests, but potentially in exchange for some gains on the Butmir package and progress on "5 plus 2." End Comment.

Biographic Note

¶10. (C) Pyotr Anatolevich Ivantsov: In a quiet move in December, the Russian MFA designated Pyotr Ivantsov as the GOR's representative to the PIC Steering Board. Ivantsov

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recently returned to Moscow after working UNMIK issues, including as political director, and is unfamiliar with much of the background on Bosnia. He holds the title of Fourth European Deputy Director (Balkans) but does not carry the title of Special Representative, a downgrade in representation from his predecessor Aleksandr Botsan-Kharchenko (who is now Russia's Ambassador to BiH). According to Fourth European Director Aleksandr Alexeyev, the change in the position was due to a change in administrative procedure, rather than a change in how the GOR judged the issue. Ivantsov is fluent in English, although as he was only coming up to speed on Bosnian issues, he had not yet developed the specialized English vocabulary to discuss the technical aspects of the issues. Ivantsov was in Brussels on February 10 for consultations with his EU counterparts, and will travel to Sarajevo February 24, in advance of the PIC Steering Board.

¶11. (C) Ivan Nikolaevich Gorbunov: The head of the BiH and Croatia desk, Ivan Gorbunov is an unusual member of Russia's diplomatic service: he is a member of a tandem couple, his wife is a more senior-ranking officer in the consular branch. He is also a skilled linguist -- in addition to his fluent English, he is the preferred Serbo-Croatian interpreter for FM Lavrov and President Medvedev for high-level meetings in the region, including with RS PM Dodik. His entire career has focused on Yugoslavia and its successor states, having served in Russia's embassies in Sarajevo and in Belgrade. Gorbunov is due to rotate out of his position at the MFA in the summer of 2010, with Russian Ambassador Kislyak to the U.S. considering him for a post in Washington. Gorbunov has one young child, under one-year in age. We have found him to

be an open and honest interlocutor. He tells us he is eager to change portfolios, and explore issues outside of southern Europe.

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